

Facts about sexual violence

Definition

Under the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 [to be enforced late 2010] rape is defined as penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth by the penis without consent. However, there is a range of sexual assault and abuse which does not fit with the legal definition of rape. These can be just as distressing and have just as much of an impact.

Prevalence

Available data suggests that nearly one in four women worldwide may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (WHO, 2002). (Available online at www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/en/index.html)

In 2008/9, 963 rapes and attempted rapes were reported to the police in Scotland. (Statistical Bulletin Crime and Justice Series, Recorded Crime in Scotland 2008-09)

In the same period, 6,331 crimes of indecency were reported.

In 2008/9 three per cent of adults had experienced at least one form of “serious sexual assault” since the age of 16. This included five per cent of women experiencing at least one form of “serious sexual assault” and one per cent of men. (2008-09 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey: Sexual Victimization and Stalking www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/12/14103338/0)

[*Serious sexual assault* is defined under the law as: forcing / attempting to force someone to have sexual intercourse or forcing / attempting to force someone to take part in other sexual activity when they do not want to]

More than half (56%) of adults experiencing at least one form of “serious sexual assault” were assaulted by their partner. Nine in ten (90%) said the offender(s) was male and eight per cent said the offender(s) was female.

Nine per cent of adults had experienced at least one form of “less serious sexual assault” since the age of 16. This included 15% of women experiencing at least one form of “less serious sexual assault” and three per cent of men.

[*Less serious sexual assault* is defined under the law as: indecent exposure; sexually threatening behaviour; touching sexually when it is not wanted]

The relationship with the offender(s) varied by the form of “less serious sexual assault” experienced since the age of 16. For indecent exposure, 73% said the offender(s) was someone they had never seen before while for sexual threats, 45% said the offender(s) was their partner and 23% said it was someone they had never seen before. For unwanted sexual touching, 18% said it was their partner, 26% said it was someone else they knew and 36% said the offender(s) was someone they had never seen before.

Almost all (96%) women experiencing any form of “less serious sexual assault” since the age of 16 said the offender(s) was male. In contrast, 48% of men experiencing any form of “less

serious sexual assault” since the age of 16, said the offender(s) was male, four in ten (40%) said the offender(s) was female and 10% said there were some male and some female offenders.

A study by NSPCC showed that a third of teenage girls in a relationship suffer an unwanted sexual act. (Christine Barter, Melanie McCarry, David Berridge and Kathy Evans, Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships, 2009, available from www.nspcc.org.uk/INFORM)

For prevalence of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), two recent World Health Organization reports have estimated figures at 20% for women and 5% for men. For any form of CSA, Cawson’s UK study (2000) found 21% for women and 11% for men, while McGhee’s Irish study (2003) found 30% for women, 24% for men. American studies range from 6% to 38% prevalence for women. (www.survivorscotland.org.uk)

Nature of rape and sexual assault

Women are far more likely to be sexually victimised in their own home than in any other location. (Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem, Findings from the British Crime Survey, Myhill and Allen, Home Office Research, 2002)

In most cases, no additional violence is used during the offence and in over 90% of cases no weapon is used or implied. (The nature of rape of females in the Metropolitan Police District, Chandni Ruparel, Home Office Research, 2004)

Women often experience repeat victimisation. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the women who experienced serious sexual violence since 16 also reported experiencing domestic violence (non-sexual threats or force), and 39 per cent had been stalked. (Walby and Allen, Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey, 2004)

Perpetrators

Most rapes are carried out by men known to the woman. Around 54% of rapes are carried out by partners/former partners. Only 17% are by strangers. (British Crime Survey, 2004).

Women are most likely to be sexually attacked by men they know in some way, most often partners (32%) or acquaintances (22%) (AIUK (2007) [Available online at <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10309>]

Criminal justice

It is estimated that between one and five and one in eight women report to the police. (British Crime Survey, 2000)

The conviction rate for rape in 2007/8 was 3.7%. (Calculated from Statistical Bulletin Crime and Justice Series: Recorded Crime in Scotland & Criminal Proceedings in Scottish Courts, Scottish Government, 2008 & 2009)

Research suggests the rate of false allegations of rape are no higher than those of other crimes. (Kelly, Lovett, and Regan, 2005)

Attitudes

A survey of 986 Scots found that:

- 24% think a woman can be at least partly responsible if she is drunk at the time of the attack
- 27% thought that a woman bore some responsibility if she wore revealing clothing
- 29% say there should be some burden of responsibility for rape if the woman is flirting
- 15% think rape can be the woman's fault if she is known to have had many sexual partners

(TNS System Three survey (February 2008) – [TNS System Three survey of 986 Scots for the Scottish Government](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/18113459/7)) www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/18113459/7

Amnesty International UK research ([Amnesty International Report on attitudes to sexual assault in the UK \(2005\)](http://www.amnesty.org.uk) www.amnesty.org.uk) found that:

- 34% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she behaved in a 'flirtatious' manner
- 30% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she was drunk
- 26% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she was wearing 'sexy or revealing' clothing
- 22% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she has had many sexual partners